



The myth of 'real' net neutrality

By Manolo Espinosa - 12/13/10 04:37 PM ET

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Recently, I had the opportunity to travel to Washington with a number of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs to visit with the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission Julius Genachowski and discuss his proposal to end the years-long net-neutrality debate.

When both sides of this tedious Washington shouting match discuss the need to spur innovation, they claim to speak for entrepreneurs like myself who bring the Internet to life by creating an ever-expanding universe of applications that improve our lives and help expand and renew our economy.

In the best of times, doing what we do takes tremendous risk. A significant number of those who attended the meeting with me have no healthcare. Like many families this Christmas, there will be fewer gifts under the tree. What we share is a firm belief in the value of our ideas and our ability to bring them to fruition.

And what we count on from Washington is a constructive and stable climate in which to create jobs and to grow. We also, to a person, believe passionately in the importance of an open Internet. Our businesses depend on it. And, many of us support the Genachowski plan because it strikes a delicate balance protecting consumer interests, while restoring certainty and removing a looming regulatory question that has for years helped weigh down the U.S. technology sector.

We are in good company in speaking up for a timely, balanced resolution. Craigslist founder Craig Newmark recently praised the Genachowski plan for "preserving the openness and freedom of the Internet ... with the least amount of government involvement." Noted Silicon Valley venture capitalist John Doerr called it a "pragmatic balance." And, their support was echoed by prominent angel investors Ron Conway and Ram Shriram, experts in the fine art of turning great ideas into leading lights of our digital economy (among their early successes was a little start-up we know today as Google).

So it was with great surprise last week that I was duly informed that I — along with my fellow entrepreneurs and luminaries of the venture capital world — am pushing "fake" net neutrality by supporting the Genachowski plan.

The organizations making this outrageous claim are correct in one key respect. There is a

clear distinction between proponents of the Genachowski approach and those who apparently believe it is "fake." On the pro side stand individuals like the FCC Chairman himself, who have successfully built businesses and managed payrolls. On the other side stand largely a group of Washington organizations that have made a brisk business out of playing "kick the can" with this issue.

So long as this debate drags on, business is booming for Washington advocacy groups and their lawyers while our innovation economy waits for the financial markets to gain some degree of confidence that cooler heads will prevail. Hanging in the balance are thousands of technology starts-ups — small businesses in urgent need of capital to continue their operations and their path to growth. Without an agreement that clarifies and protects an open Internet, investment dollars, innovation and jobs in key technology sectors will be slowed down by the lack of a protective, balanced framework.

Most employment “inside the beltway” is supported by government — and organizations that try to influence it. For this reason, Washington is heavily insulated from the pain being felt throughout the rest of the country today. In my home state of California, unemployment now stands at more than 12 percent.

There are people with solutions. And, they don’t work in the nation’s capital. They are entrepreneurs and small-business owners like myself who are busy every day trying to create, fund and market the next generation of life-altering innovation. Every one of us hopes to create enterprises that will employ hundreds if not thousands of Americans. To do this, we need a regulatory framework that provides consistency, transparency and an environment that welcomes even the smallest start-up to the Internet marketplace. We have that in the Genachowski plan.

There is a vast community beyond the Potomac that is yearning to restore growth, create jobs and renew our nation’s status as the world’s innovation leader. What we need most now from policymakers is a balanced, timely and decisive end to this Washington-centric debate.

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